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LBJ Says Soviet Could Have Made 'A Boob' of Him With Czech Invasion

By John M. Hightower

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Lyndon B. Johnson is reported to have said while he was President that the Russians "would have made a boob out of me" in 1968 if they had waited to invade Czechoslovakia until he arrived in Moscow on a planned visit. Mr. Johnson wondered why they didn't wait.

His remarks are reported in a book by Columbia University historian Henry T. Graff on periodic talks he held with Mr. Johnson and other top officials between mid-1965 and late 1968.

Graff's newly published book is "The Tuesday Cabinet," so named because Mr. Johnson and his chief diplomatic and military advisers regularly conferred around the lunch table on Tuesdays.

The book throws no important new light on major policies of the Johnson adminis-

tration, but it gives some close-up, informal glimpses of views and reactions through the critical years of the Vietnam war. Mr. Johnson welcomed the conversations because he wanted Graff as a historian to understand his policies.

Mr. Johnson's wondering why the Russians did not make a "boob" of him in 1968 reflected sensitivity about one of the biggest disappointments of his final months in office.

His final big bid for a major accomplishment toward peace was a plan personally to open U.S.-Soviet talks in Moscow. His arrangements for a trip to Russia had been completed Aug. 19. The next day the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to Czech liberalization of Communist practices.

Mr. Johnson immediately canceled the trip.

"The time and date and place were ready for announcement, but they moved into Czechoslovakia at 7 o'clock the next night," Graff quotes Mr. Johnson as saying three months later.

"The one thing I'll never understand is why they didn't move while we were meeting. At least they would have made a boob out of me."

Early in his discussions of the Vietnam war, Graff asked Mr. Johnson about the possibility of Red China's intervention.

"I don't think anybody knows," he quotes Mr. Johnson as telling him in February 1966. "I'm no expert. Of course, if I spit in her face and get close, that's one thing. But if I don't, most people say she won't."

"In the meantime, though, what are we supposed to do—hide and lie in fear? Who in the hell is the big bad wolf?"